

# Longtime Arizona legislator and NAU professor John Wettaw dies at 79

Lorraine Longhi, Arizona Republic

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(Photo: Tom Tingle/The Republic)

John Wettaw, a former chemistry professor at Northern Arizona University and longtime state lawmaker, died on Sunday, according to NAU president Rita Cheng

(<https://twitter.com/NAUPresident/status/1074461960375173120>).

"Today the Lumberjack community mourns the loss of a university icon, John Wettaw," Cheng wrote on Twitter.

He was 79.

Wettaw taught at the university for 47 years, during which time he also served as a Republican state legislator for 28 years.

Wettaw holds the record for the longest-serving Republican state legislator in Arizona history, with 20 years served in the Arizona House of Representatives and eight more years in the Senate, according to his NAU biography.

Today the Lumberjack community mourns the loss of a university icon, John Wettaw.

John dedicated his life to the sciences long before #STEM ([https://twitter.com/hashtag/STEM?src=hash&ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw](https://twitter.com/hashtag/STEM?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)) was a regularly used term. He made an impact in his field and in the classroom, and he changed the lives of students who crossed his path. [pic.twitter.com/Mwa1wJzurU](https://t.co/Mwa1wJzurU) (<https://t.co/Mwa1wJzurU>)

— Rita Cheng (@NAUPresident) December 17, 2018  
([https://twitter.com/NAUPresident/status/1074461960375173120?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw](https://twitter.com/NAUPresident/status/1074461960375173120?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw))

"Teaching chemistry and being a politician are identical," Wettaw said, according to his NAU biography (<https://www.nau.edu/Legacy/Profiles/John-Wettaw/>). "If I go into a classroom, I have to sell students on myself and on chemistry. If I go down to Phoenix, I have to sell other legislators on myself and on what my view is on a particular piece of legislation. There is absolutely no difference between the two."

During his time in the legislature, Wettaw sponsored nearly 1,400 bills, many of them education bills. *NAU Today*, the university's magazine, dubbed him the "Education Crusader."

"He always finds something people can agree on and builds from there, and he has built those skills over a long career," Sen. Randall Gnant told *The Republic* in 2000. "My guess is, you'll not see those skills again under term limits. John has forgotten more things than most legislators will ever know."

In 1999, the university named its biology and biochemistry building after Wettaw after he successfully lobbied then-Gov. Jane Hull for funds to furnish the building.

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Arizona State Sen. John Wettaw, R-Flagstaff, (right) confers with Sen. Darden Hamilton, R-Glendale, (center) as Sen. Jack Jackson, D-Window Rock (left) listens in during a vote on Gov. Jane Hull's controversial school funding plan June 28, 2000, at the State Capitol in Phoenix. (Photo: Paul Connors/Associated Press)

For nearly three decades, Wettaw shuffled back and forth on Interstate 17 from Flagstaff to Phoenix to serve on the legislature, until he retired in 2001.

"It was time," Wettaw told *The Republic* in 2000. "I wanted to just spend more time working for the university and it was no bigger decision than that."

Wettaw retired from the university in 2014.

"He made an impact in his field and in the classroom, and he changed the lives of students who crossed his path," [Cheng wrote on Twitter](#).

([https://twitter.com/NAUPresident/status/1074463797505486850?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw](https://twitter.com/NAUPresident/status/1074463797505486850?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw)) "His memory and legacy will forever live on at NAU."

In 2011, we dedicated our biochemistry building to John Wettaw. His memory and legacy will forever live on at NAU. [pic.twitter.com/FceaRdjGUT](https://twitter.com/FceaRdjGUT)

(<https://t.co/FceaRdjGUT>).

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